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Link sinks Washington's push for industry-friendly harbor

June 20, 2008 By JUDY MASTERSON
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WAUKEGAN – No life preserver can save a proposed law that seeks to assure the livelihoods of industries flanking the city's harbor.

According to state Sen. Terry Link, D-Waukegan, HB 2088 is dead in the water and he's happy he's the one holding it under.

Sponsored by state Rep. Eddie Washington the bill calls for a prohibition on any plans to dredge the harbor in an attempt to decrease the channel depths. The Waukegan Democrat's bill calls for a commercially navigable harbor with a minimum depth of 23 feet.

Washington gathered support, including co-sponsorships by local Republican representatives JoAnn Osmond (Antioch) and Sandy Cole (Grayslake), to pass the bill on May 29. But it was snatched the very next day after a tip to Link, D-Waukegan, who submerged it in Rules Committee on May 31.

Link is backing an effort by the city to "recreate the lakefront into a recreational, residential area," as stated by Ray Vukovich, Waukegan's director of governmental services.

Washington insists, along with lakefront companies National Gypsum, LaFarge, Bombadier and St. Mary's Cement, that residential, commercial and industrial can peacefully co-exist.

Washington accuses Link of conspiring with state Rep. Kathy Ryg, D-Vernon Hills, to kill the bill.

"This was collusion," Washington said. "If he (Link) has opinions, argue it on the floor like a gentleman. Why not just let it move through the Senate and rise or fall on its own merits?"

"The bill is dead," Link countered. "I want the harbor capped and the city wants it capped. We don't want it dredged."

Link cited a federal lawsuit, filed last year by Waukegan, an attempt to pressure the harbor businesses to either get out or pay \$23 million to eliminate PCBs left over from a 1992 dredging by the now-defunct Outboard Marine Corp.

The city turned to the courts after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency refused to approve an addendum to another cleanup plan that any new dredging be contingent on decertifying the harbor for industrial use.

Capping, which would decrease the harbor's depth, would quell any worry about PCBs for generations, proponents argue.

"You could still have boats coming in, just not at full depth," Link said.

But Washington foresees a loss to business and loss of jobs.

"People who work there don't need to be kicked out because Terry Link and his friends want to make everything condo," Washington said.

Vukovich said the lawsuit will continue.

North Carolina-based National Gypsum employs 59 people on the Waukegan lakefront, 63 percent of whom live in Lake County, according to spokeswoman Nancy Spurlock.

Spurlock said the sinking of HB 2088 has not shaken the wallboard manufacturer's resolve to stay on the Waukegan lakefront.

"It's not over till it's over," she said.

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